

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A moving picture coding method capable of maintaining high picture quality for an important area even in a low bit rate and gradually improving picture quality of the neighboring area as the bit rate becomes higher. According to this method, the important area detection section 122 automatically detects an important area within a frame, the gradual shift map generation section 124 generates a gradual shift map whose shift value decreases gradually from the important area toward the neighboring area. The bit shift section 130 bit-shifts DCT coefficients according to the gradual shift map. In this way, more DCT coefficients which contribute to improvement of picture quality of the important area are stored in the start portion of the enhancement layer preferentially.